

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## 2SHB 1938

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As of April 2, 2009

**Title:** An act relating to children's interests in maintaining postadoption contact with their siblings.

**Brief Description:** Concerning postadoption contact with siblings.

**Sponsors:** House Committee on Health & Human Services Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Roberts, Kagi, Angel, Walsh, Dunshee, Pettigrew, Green, Goodman, Haler and Kenney).

**Brief History:** Passed House: 3/09/09, 95-0.

**Committee Activity:** Human Services & Corrections: 3/26/09 [DP].

Ways & Means: 4/02/09.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & CORRECTIONS

**Majority Report:** Do pass.

Signed by Senators Hargrove, Chair; Regala, Vice Chair; Stevens, Ranking Minority Member; Brandland, Carrell, Kauffman and McAuliffe.

**Staff:** Jennifer Strus (786-7316)

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

**Staff:** Michael Bezanson (786-7449)

**Background:** Washington's adoption statute requires a pre-adoption home study report be submitted to the court. The report must include verification that discussions with prospective adoptive parents includes topics relating to:

- the concept that adoption is a lifelong developmental process;
- the potential for the child to experience identity confusion and feelings of loss regarding separation from birth parents;
- the potential for the child to have questions about birth parents and relatives; and
- the relevance of the child's racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage.

Open adoption agreements must be reviewed and approved by the court. The statute authorizing agreements for postadoption contact between a child adoptee and that child's

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family includes no references to siblings of the child being adopted or the potential benefit of providing for a continuation of the child's relationship with his or her siblings through an adoption agreement or informal agreement.

**Summary of Bill:** The relevance of the child's relationship with siblings and the potential benefit of facilitating postadoption contact is included in the list of issues that must be considered during the permanency planning process for children in foster care and discussed with prospective adoptive parents.

The family law court reviewing and approving an adoption agreement must encourage the consideration of the adoptive child's relationship with known siblings. If a child being adopted from foster care or that child's siblings are represented by a guardian ad litem (GAL) or an attorney in an adoption proceeding or in a dependency matter, the court reviewing the adoption agreement must inquire of the attorneys and guardians regarding the potential benefit of continued contact between the siblings.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Human Services & Corrections):** PRO: For the third year in a row, the attendees of the annual Foster Youth/Alumni Leadership Summit highlighted the need for sibling visits as one of the most pressing issues during their time in foster care. For many children in care, siblings are their last connection to their birth families. The new family does not replace the old family and the bill allows these children to maintain the connection they already have. This bill is an attempt to educate potential adoptive parents to appreciate the importance of sibling visits. In many cases, the adoption can be more successful if the adopted child sees the adoptive parents invested in the child maintaining contacts with siblings.

**Persons Testifying (Human Services & Corrections):** PRO: Bob Cooper, Washington Defender Association & Criminal Defense Lawyers; Jim Theofelis, Georgina Ramirez, Mockingbird Society; Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society.